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ABSTRACT

The sociolinguistic assessment model employed in this study demonstrated a useful approach for examining the interrelationships between community and school goals regarding bilingual education. As results indicated, not only do educators and parents differ in their sociolinguistic characteristics, but also in their selection of a bilingual education program model. The assumption that teaching/administrative staff in bilingual programs are themselves reflective of bilingual goals and orientations in their behavior was seriously questioned by this study. The model focused on a comparison of 35 parents and 37 educators regarding certain variables: their demographic background (ethnicity, native language, and place of birth), self-reported proficiency in Spanish and English (understanding, speaking, reading and writing capabilities in each language), and actual vs preferred language usage by societal domain (media, home, social services, and school). The research site was a rural bilingual community in north central Colorado. Data was obtained from questionnaire responses to 53 items showing language preference patterns in selected social situations. Despite a high level of loyalty to Spanish, the community's adult population reported a greater usage of English than Spanish. Parents (83%) reported preferences for a maintenance type of bilingual program while educators (57%) preferred a partial-transitional approach to bilingual education. (NEC)

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A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ASSESSMENT MODEL FOR BILINGUAL EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY*

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* This essay was read at various stages in its development by Robert Politzer, Arnulfo Ramirez, and Eduardo Hernandez-Chavez. Their comments have proven to be valuable in the clarification of major issues and concepts. Any shortcomings, however, are our responsibility.

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The rapid expansion of bilingual education programs in the southwestern United States during the past few years has largely been brought about by court decisions, and federal/state legislation (Carter,1978; Gonzalez,1975). In a majority of cases, the manifest function for introducing bilingual education programs into a community has been to demonstrate concern for the needs of a "deprived" group of people, while its latent function has been to insure that the rapid implementation of these programs, without taking into account the community's needs, increases their chances to be non-productive. As such, much implementation of bilingual education programs has occurred without comprehensive sociolinguistic analyses of the target student populations, and their respective school-community environments[1] (Aguirre & Fernandez,1976).

For instance, the available criteria for the selection of a bilingual education program has usually been based on very limited language assessments - language assessments that are often the interpretation of a community's needs by an external agency, or body of professionals, rather than the community's evaluation of its own linguistic needs[2] (Mackey & Ornstein,1977). As a result, many of the obstacles bilingual education programs encounter in their implementation stems from the lack and depth of the assessments, and from the lack of collaboration between the community and educational planning agency.

Despite the legal requirement that a language assessment of the student population is a prerequisite for the development of a bilingual

education program, it is usually limited to an analysis of the child's first acquired language, the language normally spoken, and the language most often spoken in the home (Rice,1976;Mercer & Mercer,1979). There is a need, however, to go beyond this superficial evaluation of linguistic background, and to begin supplying policymakers with findings and recommendations focusing on a collaborative effort between the community and school. A collaborative effort that examines such issues as the use and demand for languages in the community, the general proficiency of parents and educators in those languages, and support for their use in the schools (Fishman & Lovas,1972;Cohen,1975). Note that collaborative efforts such as these are usually recommended for use in multilingual nations as a means of insuring compatability between school and community goals (Alleyne,1973;Ohannessian & Ansre, 1975;Kloss,1969;Verdoot,n.d.).

Community Participation

The decentralization process taking place in American education has affected most federal and state compensatory education programs, including bilingual education. The regulations now involve the community in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of bilingual programs (Brown,1975;Pena,1976). The Transitional Bilingual Education Law of Massachusetts, for example, stipulates that the bilingual education units in its development of an educational program shall support the participation of a wide spectrum of people concerned with educating

children of limited English-speaking ability in the formulation of policy and procedures. Waserstein (1975) describes, for example, how a community in Delaware was influential in developing, and later monitoring, its bilingual education program. Similarly, Melikoff (1972) reports how the community of St. Lambert (French-speaking Canada) was largely responsible for the creation of a bilingual program, and Shaffer (1975) describes how the Spanish-speaking population of Crystal City, Texas took control of the school system and instituted a K-12 bilingual education program.

In recognition of the impact a community can and should have on bilingual programs, educators widely recommend strong community support in all aspects of the program (Edwards,1976). To minimize potential resistance to a bilingual education program, by responding to community demands for a staff attuned to the needs of the target ethnic group, it has become common practice for school systems to recruit personnel from the ethnic community for staffing (Betances,1977). The most expedient approach is to:

a. employ available teachers and administrators who belong to the same ethnic group as the students.

b. supplement the classroom teachers assigned to the bilingual program with paraprofessionals from the local ethnic community.

It is expected that a teaching/administrative staff that belongs to the ethnic population served by a bilingual program will be more attuned to the needs and desires of that community, and will be supportive of

the bilingual program during all its stages.

Implicit in these staffing strategies, however, is the assumption that ethnic homogeneity among group members will extend to the sharing of language use patterns, or that members will share the same everyday patterns of language use. The assumption becomes problematic when one considers that social and economic differences between school staff and the community may be of such magnitude that both groups may not have similar sociolinguistic orientations, especially in terms of the role Spanish and English are to play in education (Epstein,1977).

In addition, any divergence that arises between the bilingual teaching staff and the community being served by the school may largely be the result of concomitant effects from socioeconomic differences and orientedness to an English-speaking environment. For example, potential conflict between the two groups may center on the emphasis to be placed on English and Spanish in education[3]. While on the one hand, the community may favor the use of Spanish in all school subject areas, on the other, the teaching/administrative staff may seek to promote English rather than Spanish in order to expand the socioeconomic expectations of the bilingual students. It is proposed, therefore, that even when the school staff and local community are both bilingual and members of the same ethnic group, their sociolinguistic characteristics must be assessed so as to minimize potential resistance to bilingual education stemming from school-community conflicts.

Our Purpose

Our purpose in the following pages is to report on the testing of a sociolinguistic assessment that focuses on a collaborative effort between the school and community for the formulation of language policy and selection of a bilingual education program. Our approach incorporates many of the sociolinguistic decision-making variables outlined by Krear (1971), and many of the sociolinguistic variables outlined by Fishman & Lovas (1972) necessary for the formulation of language policy. Our sociolinguistic model requires an assessment of the sociolinguistic parameters in the bilingual community, identification of the transfer or maintenance status of the community, and selection of a bilingual education program conducive to the maintenance of both languages or to the elimination of one language in favor of the other one.

The parameters of our sociolinguistic assessment model are outlined in Figure 1, and it has been adapted to the characteristics of the bilingual community employed in this study. The model focuses on a comparison of parents and educators regarding certain variables: their demographic background, self-reported proficiency in Spanish and English, and actual vs preferred language usage by societal domain. The demographic variables encompasses ethnicity, native language, and respondent's and his/her parents' place of birth. The proficiency variable includes understanding, speaking, reading, and writing capabilities in each language. The societal domains examined are the mass

Figure 1

SOCIOLINGUISTIC ASSESSMENT
MODEL PARAMETERS

Social Groups	Social Areas: Home	School	Church	Social Services	Mass Media
PARENTS[1]					
Reported Language Use	X	X	Y	X	X
Preferred Language Use	X	X	Y	X	X
EDUCATORS[2]					
Reported Language Use	X	X	Y	X	X
Preferred Language Use	X	X	Y	X	X

X:areas examined and analyzed in this report
Y:areas examined but not analyzed in this report

1:parents of children enrolled in school K-12, but not employed by the school district

2:school staff - secondary and elementary teachers and administrators in K-12

media, home, social services, and the school domain where parents and educators indicate their choice of a bilingual education program.

In addition to the identification of the maintenance or transfer status of Spanish and English in a bilingual community, our sociolinguistic model should also reveal the similarities and differences between parents and educators concerning language use and preferred language use. It is particularly suitable for the task of determining whether ethnic and demographic homogeneity between parents and educators extends to their sociolinguistic characteristics.

The Bilingual Community

Our research site was a rural bilingual community of approximately 2500 people located in the north central section of Colorado. The community has remained relatively isolated from the socioeconomic mainstream of American society by avoiding exposure to some of the economic transformations, largely brought about by the historical introduction of the railroad and/or the mining industry, that other Spanish-speaking communities in the southwestern United States have undergone. One observable result of the community's rural and socioeconomic isolation is strong support for maintaining the Spanish language.

The bilingual education program has been in the community schools for four years. The program was initially designed to play both a restoration role, for monolingual English speakers in the ethnic

population, and a transitional one, for the monolingual Spanish speakers in the ethnic population. Operating from kindergarten through the fourth grade, it serves approximately 175 students, and has a staff of eight teacher-aides, one community coordinator, and a program coordinator.

Bilingual education was introduced in the school under the assumption that its predominantly Mexican American teaching/administrative staff would automatically support the program. Bilingual teacher aides were added to the staff to complement the classroom teachers rather than to supplement them as is common practice when a teacher is known to have limited Spanish language skills. However, instead of increasing the program's support, the introduction of the teacher aides produced serious misunderstandings over the role of the teacher and teacher aide in the program. Misunderstandings that forced the community to reexamine the role of bilingual education in the community. As we will attempt to illustrate with our data, the differential sociolinguistic orientations of teachers and parents were quite instrumental in creating an aura of confusion for the bilingual program.

This bilingual community is, thus, an excellent location in which to investigate the question of whether ethnic homogeneity between the teaching/administrative staff and the community extends to the emphasis on language choice in the school. In this community, one is more likely to find the maintenance of the Spanish language and culture, and a high degree of ethnic homogeneity between parents and educators, when

compared to urban or less isolated rural areas. However, the conflict in this community regarding the implementation and orientation of the bilingual education program warrants the observation that ethnic homogeneity may not extend to the sociolinguistic characteristics of the school personnel and the immediate community concerned with the educational process.

Data Collection Procedures

To determine general language use and language preference patterns for educators (N=37) and parents (N=35) in selected social situations, a questionnaire consisting of fifty-three items was administrered. The questionnaire was administered to respondents in the language they indicated feeling most comfortable in (e.g. Spanish or English).

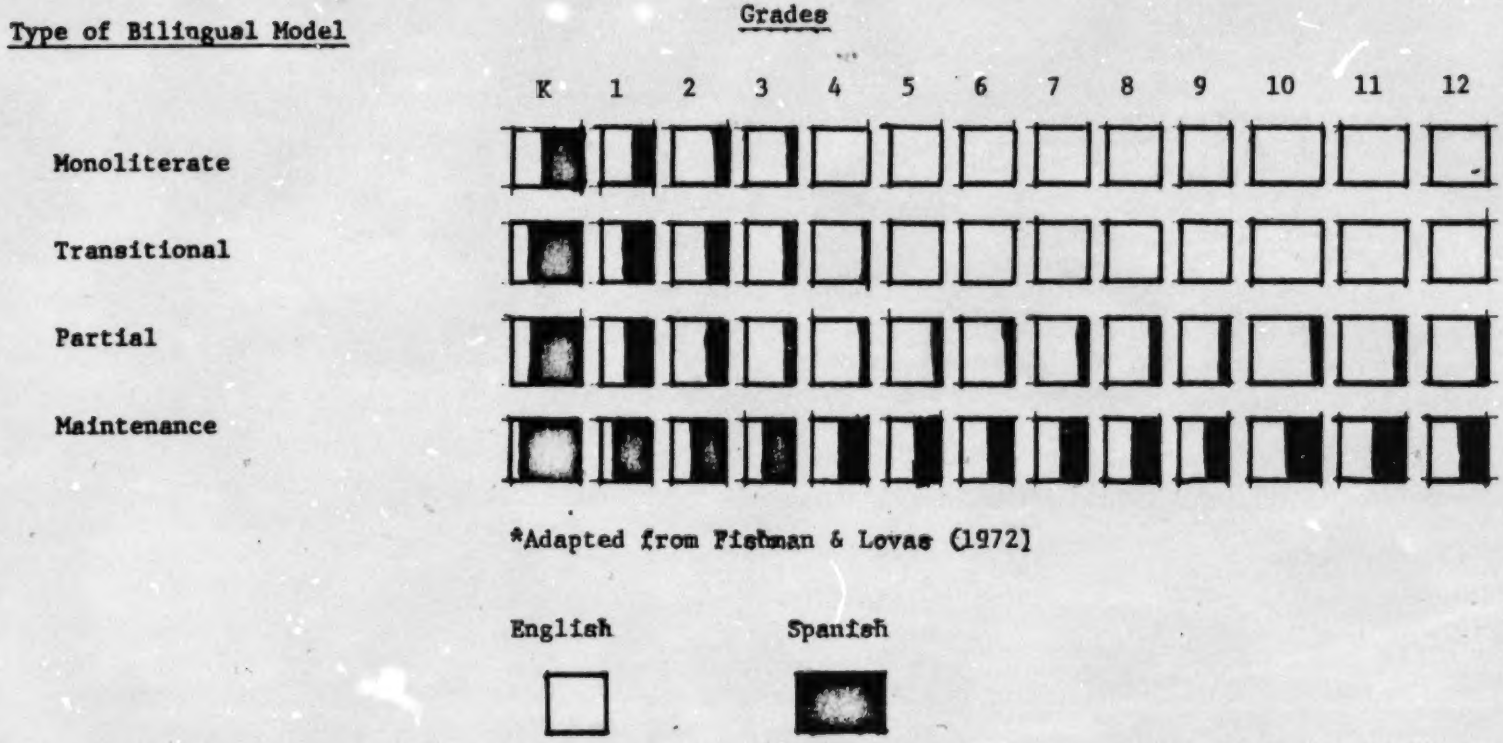
Respondents were also asked to read a description of four bilingual education models that illustrated the approximate amount of Spanish and English spoken throughout the grades (see Figure 2). The respondent's understanding of these models was closely monitored before he/she was asked what type of program they would like implemented in their schools.

Results and Analysis

The adult bilingual community examined in this study appears to be undergoing a language shift from Spanish to English language use. While respondents do report being able to speak and understand both languages, they also report having better literacy skills in English than in Spanish (see Table 1 and Table 2). This result is a sociolinguistic

FIGURE 2

Typology of Bilingual Education Models*



*Adapted from Fishman & Lovas (1972)

TABLE 1

SPANISH PROFICIENCY SELF-ESTIMATES
FOR PARENTS AND EDUCATORS

Proficiency Level	Parents (N=35)	Educators (N=37)
Understanding Ability		
excellent	26%	30%
good	60%	43%
fair	14%	27%
Speaking Ability		
excellent	17%	22%
good	63%	43%
fair	20%	35%
Reading Ability		
excellent	20%	35%
good	17%	22%
fair	63%	43%
Writing Ability		
excellent	32%	52%
good	48%	24%
fair	20%	24%

TABLE 2

ENGLISH PROFICIENCY SELF-ESTIMATES
FOR PARENTS AND EDUCATORS

Proficiency Level	Parents (N=35)	Educators (N=37)
Understanding Ability		
excellent	26%	59%
good	64%	39%
fair	10%	2%
Speaking Ability		
excellent	23%	49%
good	53%	43%
fair	24%	8%
Reading Ability		
excellent	26%	57%
good	66%	38%
fair	8%	5%
Writing Ability		
excellent	23%	57%
good	51%	41%
fair	26%	2%

condition conducive to language shift in a bilingual community (Gal,1979), in this case, a shift from Spanish to English.

Some interesting variation occurrs when one examines parents' and educators' self-identification for ethnic and linguistic background. While the majority of adult respondents identified themselves as Mexican American, a small number of educators selected the term Hispanic as an identity marker (see Table 3). This slight difference in ethnic identification becomes understandable when one considers the fact that, traditionally, Hispanic has been a label employed by individuals possessing either a certain level of material affluence and/or an extended post-secondary educational background.

Regarding their linguistic background, 86% of the parents, compared to 67% of the educators, reported Spanish as their native language (see Table 3). This result is also supportive of the general patterns for language proficiency self-estimates in Table 1 and Table 2: parents report themselves as having a much better command of communication skills in Spanish than in English, while educators rated themselves as having a better command of communication skills in English than in Spanish. In addition, the results presented in Figure 3, allows one to observe a higher level of self-reported proficiency in English than in Spanish.

Reported Use and Preferred Use of Language

When asked to report their level of language use and preferred

Figure 3

OVERALL RESPONDENTS' SELF-REPORTED PROFICIENCY
FOR COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN
ENGLISH AND SPANISH

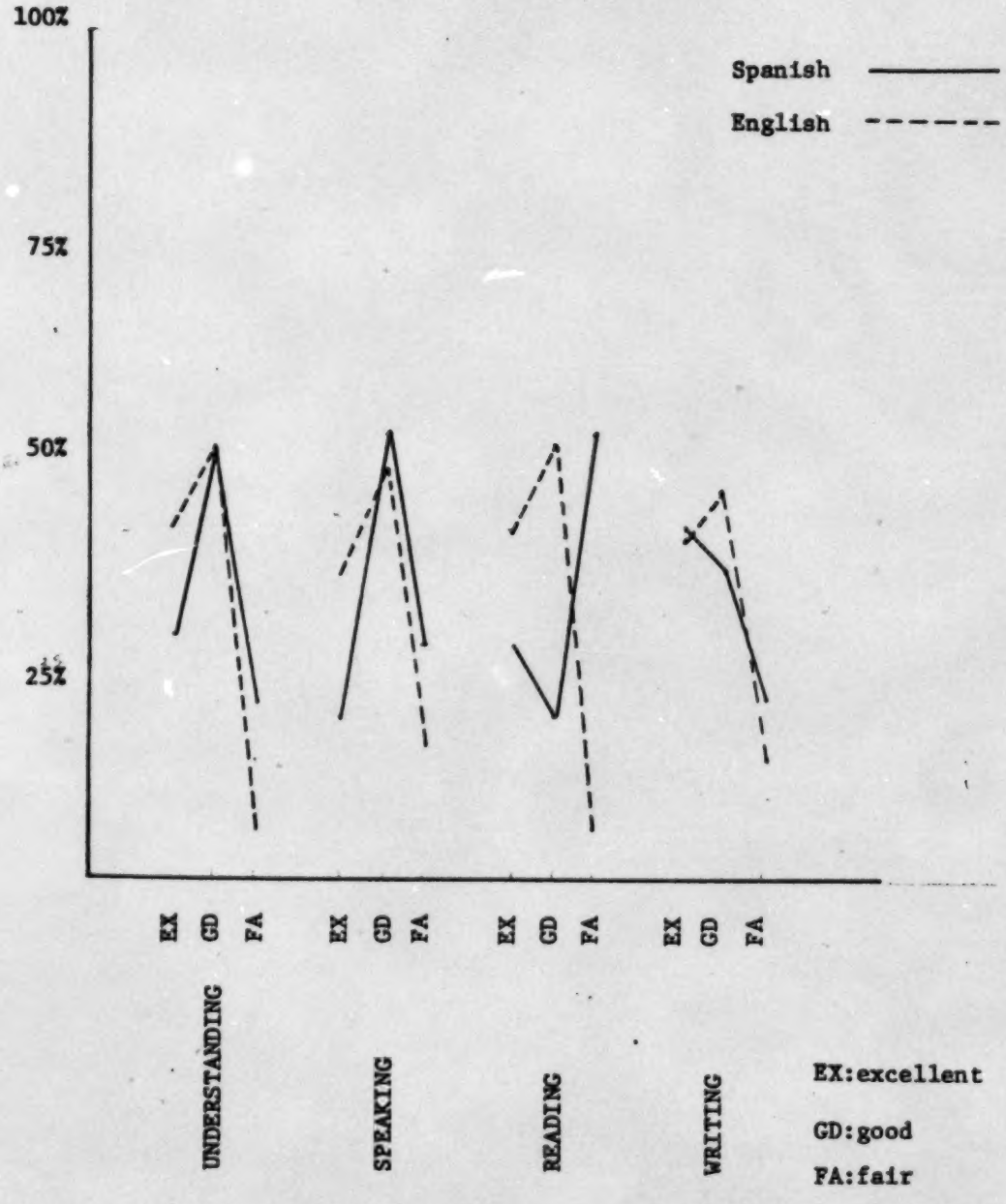


TABLE 3

DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND OF
PARENTS AND EDUCATORS

Background Variable	Parents (N=35)	Educators (N=37)
Ethnicity		
Hispanic	0	19%
Mexican American	100%	81%
Native Language		
English	14%	33%
Spanish	86%	67%
Birthplace (Community)		
Native	86%	78%
Non-native	14%	22%
Father Born in Community		
Yes	89%	77%
No	11%	23%
Mother Born in Community		
Yes	91%	81%
No	9%	19%

language use in a variety of given social situations, parents, in general, report using and preferring Spanish across the given social situations, while educators, in general, report using and preferring English across the given social situations (see Table 4). When respondents were asked to list the language they would prefer their children use with grandparents and friends, parents report a preference for Spanish, while educators report a preference for English (see Table 5).

Mass Media

Despite the limited availability of Spanish language media in the area, a key factor why respondents employ mostly English language media, parents report a much greater preference for Spanish language than educators (see Table 6). While it might appear that educators prefer media in either language, comparatively speaking, there is a slight direction in their responses for English language media[4].

Selected Social Services

Medical and legal services are available and utilized in either language by respondents. However, when compared, a higher percentage of parents report making use of services where mostly Spanish is spoken than do educators. The language in which these services are obtained probably differs among our informants because parents are more likely to make use of local services, whose staffs are primarily bilingual, whereas educators, for the most part, seek these services outside of the community in an urban area whose staffs are more likely

TABLE 4

REPORTED LANGUAGE USE AND PREFERRED LANGUAGE USE OF PARENTS AND EDUCATORS

Reported Language Use	with one's spouse at home		with one's parents		with one's friends		with one's children	
	Parents	Educators	Parents	Educators	Parents	Educators	Parents	Educators
English	11	24	8	25	6	18	18	30
Spanish	24	13	27	12	29	19	17	7
	X^2=15.6, p .05		X^2=7.47, p .05		X^2=5.52, p .05		X^2=4.62, p .05	
Preferred Language Use								
English	11	31	6	25	17	32	5	18
Spanish	24	6	29	12	18	5	30	19
	X^2=15.6, p .05		X^2=12.4, p .05		X^2=11.2, p .05		X^2=5.28, p .05	

TABLE 5

PREFERRED LANGUAGE USAGE
FOR CHILDREN

Language Usage	Parents (N=35)	Educators (N=37)
with grandparents		
English	30%	44%
Spanish	70%	56%
with friends		
English	41%	56%
Spanish	59%	44%

TABLE 6

MASS MEDIA USE AND PREFERENCE BY LANGUAGE

Reported Use	Television Programs		Radio Programs		Movies		Periodicals	
	Pa*	Ed**	Pa	Ed	Pa	Ed	Pa	Ed
English	86%	83%	80%	61%	88%	97%	85%	67%
Spanish	14%	17%	20%	39%	12%	3%	15%	33%
Preferred Use								
English	14%	41%	14%	37%	10%	44%	18%	54%
Spanish	86%	59%	86%	63%	90%	56%	82%	46%

*Pa = Parents **Ed = Educators

to be predominantly English-speaking (see Table 7).

Type of Bilingual Program

The majority of educators reported a preference for a partial model, while parents reported a preference for a maintenance model. Asked why they preferred the transitional model, educators mostly replied that (a) a maintenance model would de detrimental to the development of English, and/or (b) the implementation of a transitional model would be less problematic in terms of such factors as personnel and scheduling (see Table 8).

Summary Remarks

For more than a century this bilingual community has maintained the use of Spanish for various societal functions. However, as our results demonstrate, despite a rather high level of loyalty to Spanish, the community's adult population reports greater usage of English than Spanish. A result that can probably be attributed to generational forces in the population, the decreasing reliance on Spanish in formal social domains, and the increasing participation of the community's young in urban educational institutions that are, for the most part, oriented to an English-speaking world.

The introduction of a transitional bilingual education program four years ago was in conformity with the state's bilingual education policy. Not based on a sociolinguistic assessment of the community, however, the program was not consonant with the preferences of the

TABLE 7

REPORTED USE AND PREFERRED USE
OF MEDICAL AND LEGAL SERVICES
BY LANGUAGE

Reported Usage	Medical		Legal	
	Pa*	Ed**	Pa	Ed
Mostly English	36%	65%	59%	86%
Mostly Spanish	64%	35%	41%	14%
	X^2=4.96, p .05		X^2=7.0, p .05	
Preferred Usage				
Mostly English	21%	36%	17%	53%
Mostly Spanish	79%	64%	83%	47%
	X^2=1.98		X^2=9.94, p .05	

*Pa = Parents **Ed = Educators

TABLE 8

REPORTED PREFERENCES FOR BILINGUAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

Type of Program	Parents	Educators
Maintenance	83%	43%
Partial - Transitional	17%	57%

X^2=12.24, p .05

community regarding the retention and promotion of its linguistic and cultural heritage. Consequently, conflicts within and between the school and community occurred regarding the direction, implementation, and productivity of the bilingual program. As our results clearly demonstrate, not only do educators and parents differ in their socio-linguistic characteristics, but also in their selection of a bilingual education program model. The assumption then that teaching/administrative staff in bilingual programs are themselves reflective of bilingual goals and orientations in their behavior is seriously questioned by this study.

The sociolinguistic assessment model employed in this study, in spite of explicit and implicit structural deficiencies, demonstrates the utility of this approach for the researcher interested in examining the interrelationship between community and school goals regarding bilingual education (Hernandez-Chavez,1978). On the one hand, it demonstrates its use in evaluating the assumption of ethnic homogeneity, while on the other, it demonstrates its effectiveness in revealing the differential values, vis-a-vis reported language use and preference, bilingual speakers place on their language choice. The latter is, of course, an issue that has escaped serious attention by researchers in the area of bilingual education (Lewis,1977). This might explain why many of our bilingual education programs are really not interested in bilingualism, as much as in their service to a much larger educational process, that is largely bureaucratic in nature.

NOTES

1. The focus is, therefore, not on the cumulative growth of these programs, as much as it is on their aggregate nature. The lack of integration between school and community goals in the development of a bilingual education program predicates that growth, in terms of program expansion in the school curriculum, will arise out of a series of compromising situations between the school and community. As such, growth is additive, with the goal being to attain a large enough aggregartion to demonstrate progress. Thus, it is usually the aggregate nature of these programs that is employed in the evaluation process to demonstrate the lack of cumulative growth in bilingual education programs.

2. This perspective is, of course, not unique to bilingual education. Sociologists have long tried to demonstrate that people directly affected by public policy are rarely included in the policy-making process. For specific discussion of linguistic minorities and policy issues see: Glaser & Possony (1979:294-326), Wenner (1976), McRae (1970), Leibowitz (1976).

3. For example, participants of the 1974 Chicano Teachers Conference argued that Chicano school personnel in the Southwest are usually not responsive to the cultural and language needs of Chicano students, and that the teachers and principals are largely the product of an Anglo-American system and behave according to the norms and precepts instilled by the system (Chacon & Bowman, 1974:17-50.

4. An analysis of the residential patterns of both parents and educators revealed that educators largely reside in an area around the periphery of the community where cable television is most available. Cable television makes available Spanish language programs from the SIN network. However, educators expressed a reluctance to allow themselves and their children to view these programs.

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